

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

USIA-15 IO-14 AID-20 DRC-01 OMB-01 /125 W

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R 271009Z MAR 74

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8278

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMCONSUL UDORN

CDR USSAG NKP

S E C R E T VIENTIANE 2484

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINR, MOPS, MCAP, TH, LA

SUBJECT: REPORTED PL/NVA THREAT TO THAILAND

REF: (A) VIENTIANE 1819

(B) VIENTIANE 2009

(C) UDORN 69

(D) STATE 53210

(E) UDORN 79

1. WE SHARE THE DEPARTMENT'S CONCERN ABOUT THE NVA ALONG THE MEKONG IN NORTHERN MR-III, ALTHOUGH WE ARE UNCERTAIN AS TO WHAT ANYONE CAN DO ABOUT IT. FROM THE THAI AND LAO POINT OF VIEW, THERE ARE DEFINITE PROBLEMS INVOLVED. NVA CONTROL OF THIS AREA PROVIDES EASY ACCESS TO THAILAND FOR COMMUNIST TERRORISTS, CUTS LAOS IN HALF, PREVENTS RLG USE OF ROUTE 13 -- THE MAJOR NORTH-SOUTH ROAD CONNECTING GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED AREAS IN LAOS - AND RAISES THE THREAT OF INTERDICTION OF THE MEKONG.

2. HOWEVER, THIS PRESENCE IS NOTHING NEW. NVA/PL HAVE OPERATED IN THIS AREA FOR SEVERAL YEARS. THEY CONTROLLED THE STRETCH BETWEEN PAKSANE AND HINBOUN FOR SOME TIME BE-

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FORE THE FEBRUARY 22, 1973 CEASEFIRE. COMMUNIST TERRORISTS

HISTORICALLY HAVE BEEN INFILTRATED INTO THAILAND AND ARE SUPPORTED FROM THE LAO SIDE SOUTH OF PAKSANE. THE CONSTRUCTION OF ROUTE 81 WILL PROBABLY MEAN MORE OF THE SAME, ALTHOUGH WE DO NOT KNOW IF ROUTE 81 IS AN ALL-WEATHER ROAD. HOWEVER, WE HAVE SEEN NOTHING IN PAST REPORTING THAT LENDS CREDENCE TO AN NVA THREAT TO USG FACILITIES IN NAKHON PHANOM. WE HAVE NO INFORMATION THAT ARTILLERY POSITIONS HAVE BEEN EMPLACED IN THE HINBOUN SECTOR.

3. THE INCIDENTS REFERRED TO IN REF D DO NOT APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN AGGRESSIVE ACTIONS. THE SIX MIXED PL AND NVA BATTALIONS IN THE AREAS ARE NOT SHOULDER-TO-SHOULDER ALONG THE MEKONG; ONLY SEVERAL PLATOONS COVER 60 MILES OF RIVER BANK IN SCATTERED POSITIONS, WITH THE BULK OF THE FORCE INLAND. NVA UNITS APPEAR TO BE UNDER INSTRUCTIONS NOT TO PROVOKE THAI UNITS AND TO FIRE ONLY IF FIRED UPON. THE FIRING ON THAI RIVERCRAFT APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN DEFENSIVE. DURING THE DRY SEASON, THE NAVIGABLE MEKONG RIVER CHANNEL SHIFTS TOWARD THE LAO SIDE. BEGINNING IN NOVEMBER 1973, THE THAI BEGAN TO PARTOL THE RIVER MORE AGGRESSIVELY, ALLOWING THEIR BOATS TO DRIFT DOWNSTREAM NEAR THE LAO RIVERBANK. NVA UNITS WERE SURPRISED BY THE ACTIVITY. FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS FROM A HIGHER COMMAND, THEY SHOT AT THE THAI CRAFT ONLY WHEN THEY APPEARED HEDGING FOR THEIR POSITIONS. THE JANUARY GROUND INCIDENT AT THE HINBOUN RIVER OCCURRED WHEN A FAR BATTALION PUSHED OFFENSIVELY MORE THAN SEVEN KILOMETERS ACROSS THE HINBOUN RIVER INTO AREAS HELD BY THE NVA. THE NVA REACTED BY EXPELLING THE FAR UNITS AND DUG TRENCHES, APPARENTLY AS A DEFENSIVE PRECAUTION.

4. SOUVANNA AND THE RLGAFF ARE AWARE OF THE NVA PRESENCE IN NORTHERN MR-III. ARTICLE 13(D) WAS INSERTED IN THE LAO PROTOCOL BECAUSE OF THIS PRESENCE. BUT THE RLGAFF IS INCAPABLE OF CLEARING THIS AREA. ANY ATTEMPT TO DO SO MIGHT IMPAIR PROGRESS TOWARD FORMATION OF THE NEW COALITION GOVERNMENT. FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LAO PROTOCOL, WHICH REQUIRES WITHDRAWAL OF ALL FOREIGN TROOPS WITHIN 60 DAYS AFTER FORMATION OF THE PGNU, IS THE SUREST WAY OF REDUCING TENSION ALONG THE LAO-THAI BORDER. HOWEVER, IN THE EVENT

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THAT THE NVA DOES NOT COMPLY WITH THE PROTOCOL, WE ARE CONFIDENT THAT THE PRIME MINISTER WILL RAISE THE ISSUE OF NVA TROOPS ON THE MEKONG WITH HANOI.

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NNN

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